

Legislative Watch

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92nd Annual AGM & Convention A Success!

The OCC's 92nd Annual General Meeting & Convention took place last weekend in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Approximately 150 delegates attended the event which officially kicked off at the Opening Ceremonies on Friday, April 30. The Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce host night took place at the Fort William Historical Park where delegates were treated to a terrific evening of Northern food and fun, including minnow racing!

Saturday's breakfast keynote speaker featured OCC President and CEO, Len Crispino. Following Len was the new chair of the Finance and Taxation Committee, Mr. Derek Holt. Derek provided attendees with an overview and forecast for the Ontario economy. Policy plenary sessions were held for the remainder of the day for each policy committee and task force. Chairs of each began with a brief overview of their committee's activities and then the related resolutions were debated, discussed and voted on by the delegates. The sessions were moderated by Mr. Ron Chapman, RM Communications.

In total, a record 36 resolutions were debated: 3 were defeated, and 4 were referred to the OCC Board of Directors and/or appropriate committee or task force. A total of 29 policy resolutions were adopted by members of the OCC on May 1, 2004. As promised, the adopted resolutions were posted on the OCC website immediately following the convention. As we continue to review ways to improve our processes please feel free to send us your suggestions.

Some of the recommendations to government include:

- Working with the provincial government to formulate a comprehensive, long-term tax strategy
- Advocating for municipalities to be refunded the PST on all purchases they make
- Keeping Ontario's coal plants operational, and ensuring the province has adequate energy supply
- Reinvesting in the critical border crossings in Ontario.
- Establishing long range planning for highways and other important infrastructure

This new policy agenda will set the course of the OCC's advocacy efforts for the coming year - forming a framework to guide the Chamber as it works with the provincial government to build and improve the provincial economy.

Saturday night's Chair's Dinner was music to everyone's ears. After a scrumptious dinner, delegates enjoyed entertainment from Ontario's own Emm Gryner, whose soothing voice and musical genius were well received by all. Emm's performance marked the first for the AGM's new theme – future AGM & Conventions will showcase great Canadian talent. Visit Emm's website to learn more about her at <http://emmgryner.com>.

Congratulations to the OCC Award Winners:

- Burnie Gillspie Memorial Award received by Gail Logan of the *Greater Ottawa Chamber of Commerce*
- Chair's Award received by the *Brampton Board of Trade*
- Membership Awards received by the *Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce, Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce, and the Greater Dufferin Chamber of Commerce.*
- James Carnegie Memorial Award received by Ruth Burkholder of the *Markham Board of Trade.*

PLEASE be sure to take a few moments to complete the event evaluation for this year's AGM. Your input and feedback is critical for planning future conventions and will help us as we continue to look for ways to improve our process. The brief questionnaire can be accessed at http://www.occ.on.ca/cgi-bin/2_2004AGMEventEvaluation/index.asp. Thank you to the many delegates who have already submitted their evaluations.

All materials including speeches and presentations from the Convention are available online at www.occ.on.ca.

The OCC offers a big thank you to all the sponsors who made the AGM possible: *Chartered Accountants of Ontario, Ontario Exports Inc., Union Gas, GlaxoSmithKline, Ogilvy Renault, Certified General Accountants of Ontario, The Johnston Group, Edward Insurance Group, Sharp Electronics, and RBC Royal Bank.* And of course we could not have done it without the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce. We look forward to the 93rd Annual AGM & Convention which will take place in Sarnia Lambton, Ontario.

Legislative Update

Premier McGuinty and Minister Sorbara are considering amending the *Taxpayer Protection Act* and the *Balanced Budget Act*. Among the possible amendments are a consideration to allow for multi-year deficits. This week Transportation Minister Takhar introduced Bill 73 the *Highway Traffic Statute Law Amendment Act*. The status of other government bills includes: Bill 8 *Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act* is at committee; Bill 27 *Greenbelt Protection Act* is at committee; Bill 31 *Health Information Protection Act* is on its third reading; Bill 56 *Employment Standards Amendment Act (Family Medical Leave)* is on its second reading; Bill 63 *Employment Standards Amendment Act (Hours of Work and Other Matters)* is on its second reading; and Bill 70 *Ministry of Consumer and Business Services Statute Law Amendment Act* is on its second reading.

Health P.A. Attends OCC Committee Meeting

Peter Fonseca, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, attended the May 4 OCC Health Policy Committee Meeting.

Mr. Fonseca provided committee members with a brief overview of the government's agenda for health care in the province and spoke about transformation in health care, the need to change the model for accountability, funding vs. achieving results, and integration of the health care system.

Members then had an opportunity to ask Mr. Fonseca specific questions which included topics such as vaccination, Bill 8, injury prevention, access issues, hospital financing, doctor shortage, role of the private sector and mental health.

The OCC Health Policy Committee was very pleased that Mr. Fonseca was able to join the meeting and plans to continue to foster this relationship.

Ontario Technological Skills Competition

For the second year in a row members of the OCC Education Committee were able to attend the Ontario Technological Skills Competition which is coordinated by Skills Canada-Ontario. Over 1,000 competitors from all regions of Ontario participated in the competition over the three-day event. Students from across the province were able to showcase their talents and test themselves against industry standards. Next year's competition will take place May 2-4, 2005. For more information please visit their website at www.skillsontario.com.

Tackling Congestion at the Canada-U.S. Border

At a press conference held yesterday in Fort Erie, Ontario, the federal and provincial governments jointly announced a funding agreement set to improve highways and bridges in Niagara, Sarnia and London, Ontario.

The Honourable Tony Valeri, Minister of Transport, together with the Honourable Harinder Takhar, Ontario's Minister of Transportation, the Honourable Jim Bradley, Ontario's Minister of Tourism and Recreation, Nancy McIntosh, Chair of the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission, and Paul Koessler, Chair of the Buffalo and Fort Erie Bridge Authority announced the signing of joint contribution agreements to improve highways and bridges in Niagara and Sarnia regions.

The OCC Borders and Trade Development Committee will be releasing the results of its survey on the cost of border delays in Ontario next week along with an in-depth study related to the same topic. This study will be personally delivered to Premier Dalton McGuinty next week.

Together, both levels of government, with the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission, confirmed a joint funding agreement of \$281 million for improvements to highways and border crossing infrastructure in the three areas. This funding will support capacity upgrades to the Queen Elizabeth Way (QEW), Highways 401, 402 and 405, as well as the Queenston-Lewiston Bridge.

The federal government and the Buffalo and Fort Erie Bridge Authority also confirmed a \$42 million agreement for improvements for the Peace Bridge.

To date, the governments of Canada and Ontario have jointly announced \$623-million to improve Ontario border crossings and highway infrastructure.

For more information on today's announcement and related programs, please visit:
To view the complete news release and accompanying background please visit the Infrastructure Canada website at
www.infrastructure.gc.ca/bif/publication/newsreleases/2004/20040506forterie_e.shtml.

Increased Investment Announcement for Municipal and Rural Infrastructure

Yesterday, the federal and provincial government's announced that they will increase funding for public infrastructure in small urban centres and rural municipalities. The investments will be made through the Canada-Ontario Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund (COMRIF).

The Letters of Intent agreed by both the federal and provincial government and Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) are to:

- Develop a framework to guide project selection to maximize public benefits, especially with respect to environmental issues;
- Design a faster and simpler application process for municipalities;
- Create a joint secretariat to review and evaluate project applications;
- Establish a target for green infrastructure to protect the environment and improve public health and safety.

The investments will help small towns and rural communities comply with drinking water standards, improve sewage treatment and waste management, fix local roads and repair bridges, as well as help address other health and safety priorities.

For more information please visit the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal website at
www.pir.gov.on.ca.

Upcoming Events

Listed below are some upcoming events that may be of interest to chambers and boards:

- Energy Task Force Meeting, May 12, 2004
- Finance & Taxation Committee Meeting, May 13, 2004
- Ontario Business Advisory Council with U.S. Ambassador Paul Cellucci, May 14, 2004
- OCC Economic Recovery Tours, May 17 – May 20, 2004
- Tabling of the 2004 Ontario Budget, May 18, 2004
- Borders & Trade Development Committee, Buffalo, May 19, 2004
- Victoria Day, OCC Offices Closed, May 24, 2004
- Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, May 26, 2004